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Downsizing your ego

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To begin with, golf is not a self-esteem builder upper.

Golf is an ego cruncher. A humiliater. A pomposity puncher.

As one gets older and the handicap starts slipping like the hairline, it gets worse. The drives get shorter, the chips get shakier and the putting gets snake bitier.

Men have been known to take monkey gland injections for their golf game, thinking that injections will make everything longer and firmer. The only thing that stands up to salute is the opponent at the 19th hole bar when you buy the drinks.

Oh, there has to be a solution. Expensive new clubs? Revolutionary clubs you see advertised on television? Tapes of pros for you to emulate? Books on technique? Hundreds of books on technique.

Then there are lessons. Get some lessons. You need some lessons. Even your thirsty opponent chimes in. "Go get some lessons."

Now, getting golf lessons is not simple. You see, you want to know who is hot. Who is having that magic effect. Who is turning the hopeless case into a low handicapper.

The antennas went out and the message came back that there's this guy who has a golfing school at Makaha and he performs miracles. Roger Fredericks is his name. Del Mar College at Sheraton Makaha is his school.

Zip. We are at the Sheraton Makaha in the conference room next to the swimming pool sitting in front of Roger Fredericks. He is a slightly built, handsome, likable young man who is intense and precise in the message he wants you to hear.

"A majority of great players have very unorthodox golf swings. Arnie Palmer, Chi Chi Rodriguez, Lee Trevino. Jack Nicklaus has frozen scapula muscles that cause his flying right elbow. Ben Hogan has tight hamstrings that limit his hip rotation and cause his elbow to stay in tight.

"Look at Calvin Peete, with a polio arm, and still one of the most accurate golfers to ever play the circuit. The same with Julius Boros."

(I immediately liked Roger Fredericks. Maybe there was hope.)

"Everybody is built differently. Long, short, lean, fat. After years of studying anatomy and biomechanics we have learned that your body is your golf swing so we design a golf swing that your body will respond to."

Roger showed TV tapes and swings of several famous golfers. Where they differed. Where they had similarities.

"There are only two things that all good golfers do with swing mechanics. One, when they are half way back in their swing, their shoulders have nearly made a full turn. Two, by the time their club head meets the ball, their hips are already facing the target."

With that, each student went before the camera and had his swing taped, simultaneously from the rear and from the front, first with a club and then with a teaching device that necessitated a stronger swing.

Roger then analyzed each swing in slow motion, marking the position on the screen with a crayon of the student's position of the head, the hips, and the finish of the club.

Then the class reformed on the driving range and we were taped again from the front and back alone and then with Roger as a model. Then back to the clubhouse and the swings were analyzed again.

It is surprising how much you learn so quickly.

First of all, you are shocked how you look. How did I get so old? Where is all of my hair? How did I get so — so stout?

Then the swing! That creaking, all-arms bunt. No back swing. No follow through. Where is the Fred Couples swing that I thought I was executing?

It was a great lesson. It didn't build any ego — but then that's golf. But it did help my game.

Note: in mid-March, Roger is moving the Del Mar College to Royal Lahaina Resort on Maui.